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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR,S MEETING WITH POSSIBLE NEW SPANISH  
FOREIGN MINISTER MORATINOS

REF: STATE 2311

Classified By: Ambassador George Argyros for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Argyros had a cordial discussion March 22 with Miguel Angel Moratinos, reported to be the leading candidate to serve as Foreign Minister under the government of Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) leader Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. Moratinos stressed Zapatero,s appreciation for the President,s phone call after the March 14 Spanish elections. Moratinos was also grateful for Secretary Powell,s phone call to him on Friday, March 18.

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Moratinos said that Zapatero had asked him to convey to the Ambassador that his government will want to maintain the same level of excellent bilateral relations that had been constructed during the Popular Party (PP) government, and would express its differences constructively, as among friends. On Iraq, Moratinos reiterated Zapatero,s position that absent a UN mandate for troops there, Spanish troops would be withdrawn. However, he underscored that the U.S. and Spain must remain focused on their shared objective in Iraq: promoting stability and democracy. He said we should work to find a way to meet these objectives "with or without" Spanish troops. He also said that the PSOE government was considering increasing Spanish presence in Afghanistan, from where PSOE sees the most direct Al-Qaeda threat, demonstrating that PSOE would not appease terrorists.

2. (C) Moratinos said that Zapatero was grateful for the USG response to the terrorist attacks and the Spanish elections, but was concerned about criticism in the U.S. press and some other "sectors" that undermined the legitimacy of the Spanish elections by saying that Al-Qaeda had put PSOE in power. "This is a redline for us, which we cannot accept," Moratinos said, and asked for USG help in dispelling this image. Ambassador Argyros drew from talking points in refel to convey USG,s desire to work constructively with the new Spanish government on counter-terrorism and a range of other issues. END SUMMARY

3. (C) Moratinos opened the March 22 meeting with Ambassador Argyros by expressing his and President-elect Zapatero,s deep appreciation for the spirit and tone of the phone calls from President Bush to Zapatero and Secretary Powell to Moratinos. He said Zapatero has specifically asked him to convey to Ambassador Argyros that the Spanish relationship with the U.S. would be his government's high priority. PSOE wanted to build on the close ties that the Popular Party under President Aznar had built with the U.S. It would be "stupidity" to end these ties, and PSOE wants to build on this strong relationship, Moratinos said. Moratinos noted that Spain will want to strengthen its ties with Europe, "our family," but that this does not contradict the need for close ties with the U.S. PSOE wants rich U.S.-EU ties and strong U.S.-Spanish bilateral relations, he added. "We intend to work on the basis of no change" in our bilateral relations from the PP government. He said that the difference between the PSOE and PP approach would be that while PSOE would try to be "constructively involved" in Iraq and the Middle East, the new government would convey its concerns to the U.S., in the spirit of friendship and the desire to find common ground.

4. (C) Moratinos expressed appreciation for his phone call with Secretary Powell, which he called "excellent." Moratinos said that he had encountered the Secretary on various occasions in his capacity as EU envoy, and he would "never forget" the warmth of the Secretary's contacts with him. In the phone call, Moratinos said he had expressed his desire, as soon as he is formally invested as Foreign Minister, to visit Washington as his first trip. He reiterated this to the Ambassador. Moratinos said the objective would be to underscore our strong ties and to have a serious discussion about what we can and cannot do on certain issues, and to find common ground. He thought the government might be formally in place in the third week of April and would like to visit right after that.

5. (C) Ambassador Argyros expressed deep condolences for the March 11 terrorist attacks. Moratinos said that the President and Secretary Powell had reacted sincerely to the attacks and appropriately to the results of the Spanish elections three days later. Moratinos said that Zapatero was

concerned by the reaction by some press and "some sectors" in the U.S. (but not the USG itself) that Al-Qaeda handed PSOE their electoral victory. This, Moratinos said, undermined the legitimacy of the Spanish election results. Spain is a serious democracy, he said, with a sense of pride and commitment in defending and supporting what Spain has built through the years. Moratinos said that PSOE "will not accept" criticism that Al-Qaeda put Zapatero in power. He said this would be an insult to Zapatero, to Spanish democracy and the Spanish people. Moratinos asked for USG help ) "Whatever you can do" to help dispel this image. This is a "redline" for PSOE, he stressed. PSOE is not going to accept the image that the Spanish Republic is a banana republic. Ambassador Argyros noted USG statements that the elections 3 days after the horrific terrorist attacks was a victory for Spanish democracy.

16. (C) Moratinos and Argyros agreed on the importance of avoiding setting US-Spanish relations through rhetoric and the need for private dialogue and meetings. Ambassador Argyros also suggested the importance of avoiding commentary or speculation on the US elections by senior PSOE leadership. Moratinos said that PSOE, including Zapatero, understood this. He said that there would be no more commentary from Zapatero or the PSOE on the US elections.

17. (C) On Iraq, Moratinos said that "if there is not a change in the role of the UN" in Iraq, we will pull out our troops. But, he asked the Ambassador to convey to the President and the Secretary that Spanish commitment to a stable, democratic Iraq remained unwavering, and that this would continue "with or without Spanish troops." Moratinos said PSOE knows the U.S. would prefer that the troops remain, but, he added, it is important to underscore that we share the same objective of a democratic, stable Iraq. "Let's talk together," he said, about how we can achieve this objective. The U.S., he said, has a great role to play in this, and should. "We are not going to put our finger in your eye" on Iraq, according to Moratinos. Again, he reiterated his desire to discuss how we can achieve our objectives in Iraq "with or without" Spanish troops.

18. (C) Ambassador Argyros underscored our commitment to maintain strong US-Spanish ties in NATO. Moratinos said that "nothing will change at all" on NATO issues, noting that the USG and the previous PSOE government had had excellent relations. Moratinos said that the new government was thinking of increasing Spanish involvement in Afghanistan, to help counter Al-Qaeda there. He said PSOE wanted to make clear that it would not appease Al-Qaeda, and wanted to respond in way that Spain could be most effective. He noted that the new government would have a commitment to the Spanish people to react to the March 11 attacks. He indicated that increasing Spain's role in Afghanistan would also show that the PSOE government was not appeasing terrorists.

19. (C) On counter-terrorism, Moratinos said that Spain, Europe and the US needed to work together to revisit their counter-terrorism strategy (he would not call it a "war" because that would give legitimacy to the terrorists, he said), since the current strategy has not stemmed the tide of terrorism. Spain might call for a dialogue between the US and the EU on terrorism, to have a fresh discussion of strategy, identify what has worked and what has failed.

110. (C) Ambassador Argyros also underscored areas in which the U.S. and Spain share common interests, such as Latin America, where both Spain and the U.S. have huge investments and an interest in stability and democracy. Moratinos agreed.

111. (C) On the Middle East Moratinos mentioned the need to maintain the commitment to the Roadmap. He expressed deep concern, however, about the effect of the assassination just minutes before this meeting, by Israeli forces of the Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Moratinos had to break briefly from the meeting to give a statement to the Spanish press on the issue. He said that he considered this leader reprehensible, but was deeply concerned about the impact in the region of this "extra-judicial" killing (see paragraph 14 for text of Moratinos' March 22 statement on Hamas killing).

112. (C) At the close of the discussion, both the Ambassador and Moratinos agreed on the importance of building on the U.S.-Spanish ties relationship and our shared commitment to the war on terrorism. Ambassador Argyros throughout the meeting underscored the USG's desire to work closely with the new government on issues of common concern, noting that, as among friends, there would be some issues on which we would have differences. Both also stressed the need to avoid developing our relationship through public rhetoric rather than private dialogue.

113. (U) Moratinos' statement on Hamas killing, in interview on Spanish national radio: "It puts the situation in the Middle East and relations between Israel and Palestine back

into a situation of a vicious circle of violence from which we are unable to emerge. Therefore I believe we all understand and we all share the state of Israel's security needs, but that cannot justify going outside the rule of law to fight terrorism when there are commitments to respect the rule of law, and that is what we have always said: these kinds of extrajudicial operations must be avoided and ended, because they only create greater cries for vengeance, greater unease and frustration among the Palestinian population."

ARGYROS